

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES.

MESSAGE

FROM THE

PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES,

TRANSMITTING,

In response to Senate resolution of May 9, a report of the Secretary of State, accompanied by copies of printed documents containing the information desired respecting the historical archives deposited in the Department of State.

MAY 16, 1896.—Laid on the table and ordered to be printed.

To the Senate:

I transmit herewith, in response to the resolution of the Senate dated the 9th instant, and addressed to the Secretary of State, a report of that officer, accompanied by copies of printed documents containing the information desired respecting the historical archives deposited in the Department of State.

GROVER CLEVELAND.

EXECUTIVE MANSION,
Washington, May 16, 1896.

THE PRESIDENT:

The undersigned, Secretary of State, having received a resolution adopted by the Senate of the United States on May 9, 1896, in the following words—

Resolved, That the Secretary of State be, and he is hereby, directed to inform the Senate, at his earliest convenience, to what extent and under what conditions the historical documents deposited in the Department of State are accessible to students of American history—

has the honor to lay before the President copies of printed documents containing the desired information to the end that, if in the President's judgment not incompatible with the public interests, the same may be transmitted to the Senate in response to the resolution recited.

Respectfully submitted.

RICHARD OLNEY.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE,
Washington, May 16, 1896.

ACCOMPANIMENTS.

1. Bulletin of the Bureau of Rolls and Library, No. 1, September, 1893 (with reference to pages 5 and 6, "Access to the Manuscripts").
2. Special rules as to manuscripts deposited in the Bureau of Rolls and Library of the Department of State. (Circular for distribution.)
3. "The Historical Archives of the Department of State." From the Annual Report of the American Historical Association, 1894, being an extract from House Miscellaneous Document No. 91, Fifty-third Congress, third session, volume 17. (Covering the subject of the resolution, and with special reference to pages 281, 292, 293, and 294.)

(1) ACCESS TO THE MANUSCRIPTS.

[From Bulletin No. 1 of the Bureau of Rolls and Library of the Department of State, pp. 5-6.]

The privilege of access to the manuscript archives of the Department of State may be secured, so far as the facilities at command and the convenience of the office admit, upon application by letter to the Secretary of State. Applicants should describe as concisely and definitely as may be possible the papers they desire to consult, the scope of the examination contemplated, and the period of time during which they purpose to avail themselves of the permission, if accorded.

The privilege is to be exercised under the following—

SPECIAL RULES AS TO MANUSCRIPTS DEPOSITED IN THE BUREAU OF ROLLS AND LIBRARY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE.

I. Persons to whom the privilege of consulting the manuscript archives of the Department of State is granted can exercise the permission only subject to the convenience of the Department, and the uninterrupted transaction of its business.

II. No manuscript shall, at any time, be taken out of the Department except by order in writing of the Secretary or an Assistant Secretary.

III. No manuscript shall be taken out of the Bureau of Rolls and Library, into any room of the Department, until a receipt in form and descriptive of the paper or volume be signed by the official taking the same, and delivered to the chief of the Bureau, or, in his absence, to the person in charge.

IV. No manuscript shall be detained from its place on the shelves of the Bureau of Rolls and Library after 4 p. m. of the day it shall have been taken; and no manuscript shall be taken from its place on the shelves by any others than the clerks in charge, except by special arrangement in exceptional circumstances.

V. The use of the indexes in the room in which the old archives are deposited is not permitted except through the clerks in charge.

VI. The privilege of consulting the manuscript archives does not include the use of the library. The latter privilege must be independently asked of the chief of the Bureau of Rolls and Library.

By order of the Secretary of State.

[Circular, for distribution.]

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Any violation of the foregoing rules will be regarded as sufficient cause for the immediate withdrawal of the privilege granted.

[Extracts from H. Mis. Doc. No. 91, Fifty-third Congress, third session, vol. 17, pp. 281, 292-294.]

(3) XVII.—THE HISTORICAL ARCHIVES OF THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE.

By ANDREW HUSSEY ALLEN, Chief of the Bureau of Rolls and Library.

The historical archives deposited in the Department of State, by several acts of Congress, for preservation, and presumably with the purpose of ultimate publication, are regarded without material divergence of intelligent opinion as the most valuable collection of documents extant upon the early political history of the nation. But a lack of popular knowledge touching their volume, value, condition, and accessibility has within a few years by persistent fostering been developed into a serious misconception of the Department's purposes respecting their uses—a misconception which finally appeared last year in a public statement of the nature of an assault upon the Department by a prominent member of this association (formerly its president), untimely, unjustified, and further confusing the situation. The purpose of this paper, within the brief time and space allotted, is, at this, the earliest opportunity, to correct this misapprehension, so far as possible, first, by a statement of facts in contradiction, and secondly, by such assurances as incidental comment may convey.

These archives are virtually held in trust by the Department for the use of historical writers and students, and it is their devotion to that use with which their custodians are concerned.

* * * * *

The Department has no archivist who "has time to give to the needs of historical investigators," says Mr. Poole. On the contrary, the custodian of the manuscripts has time and has always had time to give to the needs of historical investigators, within reasonable bounds. These bounds are indicated in two passages of a letter of October 18, 1890, by the Second Assistant Secretary of State. He wrote:

First. The Department can not undertake to do any part of the work of an editor nor compiler.

Secondly. It neither has anyone who could properly take the responsibility of making any selection of papers for a private citizen, nor has it a sufficient force to enable it to copy the papers after selection has been made.

But copyists have been repeatedly, and are constantly, accommodated.

One of the functions of the Department of State conferred by the acts creating it an Executive Department is the care of the historical archives of the Continental Congress. That function has been continuously and is still exercised, according to the means provided, by a force trained to the custody and preservation of some of the most valuable archives of the Government—the laws of the United States since the foundation of the nation and the treaties with foreign powers since the treaty of February 6, 1778, with France.

I have said that the purpose of the Department of State was to make these papers accessible to historical investigators. With that purpose in view the Department is doing everything permitted by its resources. It can hardly with propriety be advertised in the newspapers, nor committed to a general circular of information to be distributed indiscriminately without solicitation. It has, however, during the past year been made known by the Bulletin, and earlier, presumably, through persons exercising the privilege of access. It has been obstructed during the same period by the newspaper assault recited, and by the paragraph in a report of the last annual meeting of this association already quoted. All adverse action, as I have suggested, is perhaps traceable to one source. But whether that be so or not, we may properly consider the apparent difference of motive. In its constitution this association declares that "its object shall be the promotion of historical studies." Mr. Poole's mistaken assertions were undoubtedly made from impersonal motives, with that object in mind. Beyond the revival of a personal attack upon a former custodian of the papers, the only evident object of the newspaper was a sensation. The newspaper charges, considered by an unbiased committee and disposed of, may safely be eliminated from further consideration here as an obstruction to the profitable uses of the archives.

The object of this association, so far as these precious papers are concerned, can just now be served better by the exercise of its influence for legislative action providing for the preservation and publication of the papers than by the suggestion or promotion of measures looking to the erection of a hall of records. Let that come later.

An augmentation of the force engaged in the work of preservation and enlargement of space by acquisition of one or two additional rooms are the pressing needs. Government building is slow; the completion of such a depository as a hall of records is somewhat remote, however desirable. The papers in their present condition can not be expected to survive time and wear indefinitely. They have not been dipped in the fountain of Ponce de Leon's quest; they can not be withheld from inspection, except when actually in the hands of the restorers. On the other hand, the work can not properly progress in haste. Experience and skill are essential to its adequate performance. It is hardly worth while to spend effort in combating extreme theories. These manuscripts can not be shuffled like cards nor rushed into print like a newspaper "extra."

Meanwhile access to them will continue to be asked and accorded without special favor, and with no further discrimination of individuals by the Department than that involved in a necessary ascertainment of the carefulness, responsibility, and good faith of the investigator, a discrimination which will probably debar only curiosity seekers and unaccredited persons, a class with which the custodians of the archives have had comparatively little or no acquaintance.

A comprehensive announcement on the subject of access has already been made in these terms by order of the Secretary of State:

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To deal practically with these historical papers this association should place itself in accord with the Department or direct its efforts to the modification or enlargement of existing official methods—which ever course may seem the wiser. It is not believed that any historical student has been deterred from seeking access to the archives by any other than exterior agents, of which, since the publication of its last annual report, the American Historical Association must be considered one. It is hardly necessary for me to add that it is not believed that Mr. Poole would have made the report he did make upon a condition of affairs respecting these papers as existing in 1893, had he or any reliable representative of his visited the Bureau of Rolls and Library within a year or two preceding the date of his statement, when the facts at first hand were obtainable and were not in agreement with his authority.

